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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to provide a framework within which the terminology used to talk about the learner's interlanguage may be defined so as to represent categories of types of interlanguage phenomena which are often discussed by teachers and researchers interested in second language acquisition. Several distinct types of "communication strategies" which are for the most part observable in the various domains of language (phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical) are discussed and illustrated. (Author)

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Elaine Tarone, Andrew D. Cohen, & Guy Dumas

Abstract

This paper attempts to provide a framework within which the terminology used to talk about the learner's interlanguage may be defined so as to represent categories of types of interlanguage phenomena which are often discussed by teachers and researchers interested in second language acquisition. Several distinct types of "communication strategies" which are for the most part observable in the various domains of language (phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical) are discussed and illustrated.

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A CLOSER LOOK AT SOME INTERLANGUAGE TERMINOLOGY: A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES.[1]

Elaine Tarone, Andrew D.Cohen, and Guy Dumas.

The field of second-language acquisition research is a relatively new one.At present, a good deal of research is being done on the interlanguages of learners in a variety of situations, and as that research is being reported in conferences, seminars and journals of various kinds, it is becoming increasingly apparent that terms such as "production strategy" need to be more fully operationalized in order to be truly useful to researchers and to teachers. This paper represents an attempt to provide a framework within which such terminology may be defined so as to represent categories of types of interlanguage phenomena which have been discussed to date. In effect, one goal of this paper is to provide some order for interlanguage data. A secondary goal is to shift the focus for language teachers and teacher trainees away from teaching methods and onto the interpretation of the learner's interlanguage. The framework which we present here is intended as a working model. We present it in order to generate discussion which will hopefully lead to a degree of consensus in the field of second-language acquisition research regarding the use of some basic terminology.

The term "production strategy" is defined in Tarone, Frauenfelder, and Selinker (1976) as a "systematic attempt by the learner to express meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed". However, certain interlanguage strategies associated with production also apply to compre-

hension of language as well. For example, the learner can systematically overgeneralize the meaning of a word he hears in one context to the same word used in another context. Likewise, he can systematically alter target language input (e.g. add, delete, substitute, or transpose forms) to make such input more consistent with his native language---hence, negative transfer in comprehension of the target language. We do not suggest that interlanguage comprehension data look like interlanguage production data. We aren't sure what they look like, and it is the task of another paper to deal with interlanguage comprehension. Rather, we simply wish to broaden the terminology to include this dimension of communication as well.[2] In place of production strategy, then, we will refer to "communication strategy", and define it as a systematic attempt by the learner to express or decode meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed.

We have been able to identify several distinct types of communication strategies commonly observable in interlanguages, and for the most part have found examples of those patterns as they involve the communication of phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical elements of language (see Table 1).

The first communication strategy listed in Table 1 is that of transfer from the native language (NL). Here we mean the type of negative transfer from the native language (Selinker, 1969) resulting in utterances that are not just inappropriate but actually incorrect by native standards (as distinguished from inappropriate but grammatically acceptable utterances described below as examples of "overelaboration"). This phenomenon can be observed in phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. In phonology, the

speaker may transfer a sound from his native language to the target, e.g. /ʃip/ for /ʃip/. In morphology, the speaker may substitute his native language's rule for forming the possessive: e.g. "the book of Jack" for "Jack's book". In syntax, for example, the learner transfers his native language system for indirect object pronouns to the target language: e.g. "Dió a ellos" instead of "Les dió a ellos". In lexicon, the learner indulges in loanshift (Haugen, 1950), whereby he uses a native language meaning for an already existing word in the target language: e.g. "Je sais Jean" instead of "Je connais Jean".

A second communication strategy is that of overgeneralization--- the application of a rule of the target language to inappropriate target language forms or contexts (Richards, 1971). This phenomenon may also be observed in phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. In phonology, one may find a newly-learned sound pattern used in inappropriate contexts, such as when the flap r in Spanish is overgeneralized to trill contexts: e.g. "El carro /karo/ es caro". A morphological example of overgeneralization might be the English-L2 utterance "He goed" or the French-L2 utterance "Il a tombé" instead of "Il est tombé". In the latter example one notes that it is not always easy to differentiate between L2 learner overgeneralization and L1 dialect speakers' overgeneralization (Mougeon & Hébrard, 1975). A look at the input language might help error analysis in such cases. A syntactic overgeneralization in English-L2 might be: "I don't know what is it", where the question word order with subject-verb-inversion is generalized to statements. Finally, we may find a type of overgeneralization in the use of lexical items, where an item may be used in inappropriate contexts because the learner is unaware of the semantic limitations contingent on its use: e.g. "He is pretty".

At the theoretical level, overgeneralization is differentiated from "transfer from NL" in that in overgeneralization, it is always a rule of the target language which is used in place of the correct target language rule. In transfer, the learner is using a native language form (perhaps motivated by a native language rule) in place of the correct target language rule.

At the empirical level, it is a matter of controversy as to whether certain interlanguage forms should be considered a result of transfer from NL or rather overgeneralization of the target language (see, for example, Dulay & Burt, 1975; Cohen, 1975,Ch.8). One way to attempt to resolve the controversy is by using the learner as informant in explaining the errors, assuming that he can provide reliable explanations (Cohen & Robbins, 1976). In reality, it may not be possible to firmly establish whether a learner is utilizing the communication strategy of transfer or of overgeneralization in producing an interlanguage form. He may, in fact, be utilizing some combination of both (Selinker, Swain, & Dumas, 1975).

The third communication strategy we observe is the prefabricated pattern, defined by Hakuta (1975) as a "regular patterned segment of speech" employed "without knowledge of its underlying structure, but with the knowledge as to which particular situations call for what patterns". Prefabricated patterns could in a way be considered as a sub-category of overgeneralization; to our knowledge, they have been shown to occur only in the syntactic domain. The "do-you" pattern described by Hakuta is a typical example, producing (among others):"what do you doing?"for "What are you doing".

A fourth communication strategy which has been observed is one of

overelaboration (after "over-indulgence"--Levenston, 1971), in which the learner, in an attempt to produce careful target language utterances, produces utterances which seem stilted and inordinately formal. While these utterances are not native-like, they might well be correct in purely grammatical terms. It is reasonable to suppose that this strategy may be closely related to the character of the learning situation. Thus, an emphasis on the written language in the learning situation would likely lead to the production in speech of forms usually restricted to writing. The identification of overelaboration calls for an awareness of context, an overelaboration being a form judged anomalous in a given context. An example of phonological overelaboration would be the production in casual speech of the utterance /hwʌt ar ju duɪŋ/, rather than the more typical /wʌʧə duɪn/. In morphology, a consistent use of full forms rather than contracted forms might be considered a type of overelaboration:e.g., "I would not have gone" for "I wouldn't've gone". In syntax, similarly, one might find forms specified which are ordinarily deleted, especially in casual styles:e.g.,"Buddy, that's my foot which you're standing on". Such overelaboration may be the result of transfer from NL. For example, in Hebrew there is no optional deletion of the relative pronoun /ʃɛ/ (that) introducing a relative clause. By the same token, English speakers learning Spanish or Hebrew, which have optional or preferred deletion of the subject pronoun in all or in certain tenses, will overuse the subject pronoun:e.g.,"Yo quiero ir", where "Quiero ir" is sufficient. An overelaboration might also in the use of overly-formal or esoteric lexical items in place of more frequently-used target-language words:e.g.,"The people next door are rather indigent", where "poor" would be more appropriate.

A fifth communication strategy appears only in the phonological domain

-- that of epenthesis, or vowel-insertion. Here the learner is unable to produce unfamiliar consonant clusters in the target language, and in attempts to produce them, he uses schwa vowels between consonants, as:

/sətəre:/ for /stre:/ ("stray"). (See Tarone, 1976, for a more extensive illustration of this phenomenon.)

The last six communication strategies are all classed as different types of avoidance, that is, these strategies are all different means of getting around target-language rules or forms which are not yet an established part of the learner's competence. Upon questioning, the learner may indicate an awareness of the target language form or rule, but prefers not to attempt to use it. (Several of these patterns are described in Tarone, Frauenfelder, & Selinker, 1976-- some of them under different names.)

Topic avoidance is the attempt to totally evade communication about topics which require the use of target language rules or forms which the learner does not yet know very well. Topic avoidance may take the form of either a change of topic or no verbal response at all. For example, a learner may move away from a discussion about pollution problems if the pronunciation of /r/ and /l/ causes problems, or avoid a discussion of what happened the previous day because it calls for the past tense inflection. Likewise, the learner may avoid discussions of an abstract or theoretical nature due to an uncertainty as to the appropriate syntactic constructions or the appropriate technical vocabulary (see Table 1).

In semantic avoidance, the learner evades the communication of content for which the appropriate target language rules and forms are not available, by talking about related concepts which may presuppose the desired content.

Examples of this pattern are given in Table 1; in one instance, where the learner wants to avoid the use of the subjunctive in Spanish, and is asked:

¿Qué quieren los pájaros que haga la mamá?
(What do the birds want their mama to do?)

the learner responds:

Quieren comer. (They want to eat.)

thus avoiding the subjunctive while indirectly providing the requested information.

Appeal to authority (Tarone, Frauenfelder, & Selinker, 1976) occurs when the learner asks someone else to supply a form or lexical item, asks if a form or item is correct, or else "looks it up" in a dictionary. This pattern may be used to deal with problems in all four domains depicted in Table 1.

Paraphrase refers to the rewording of the message in an alternate, acceptable, target language construction, in order to avoid a more difficult form or construction. So, we may find the following examples: to avoid liaison in French, learners may use "les garçons et les filles" for "les enfants"(Spilka, 1975); to avoid the French partitive "en", the learners may produce the specified form "J'ai trois pommes",rather than "J'en ai trois"; and, to avoid the subjunctive form in "Il faut que nous partions", the learners may say "Il nous faut partir", (Spilka, 1975). In the area of lexical paraphrase, we may find several different types, as illustrated in Table 1. A high coverage word (Mackey & Savard, 1967) is a superordinate term used in place of a subordinate term which carries more information in a particular context --e.g., "tool" for "wrench". The learner may find it economical to learn abstract,superordinate words which can be used more

frequently. A low frequency word is a relatively obscure, uncommon word used in place of the more appropriate general term --e.g., "to labor" for "to work", where the item "to work" is being avoided. Word-coinage (Varadi, 1973) is the creation of a non-existant lexical item in the target language, in situations where the desired lexical item is not known --e.g., "airball" for "balloon". Circumlocution is a description of the desired lexical item or a definition of it in other words -- as in "a thing you dry your hands on" for "towel".

Another type of avoidance strategy is message abandonment whereby communication on a topic is initiated but then cut short because the learner runs into difficulty with a target language form or rule. The learner stops in mid-sentence, with no appeal to authority to help finish the utterance: e.g.,

"Les oiseaux ga..." for "Les oiseaux gazouillent dans les arbres".

"El queria que yo..." for "El queria que yo fuera a la tienda".

The final type of avoidance strategy that we have been able to catalogue is that of linguistically-motivated language switch. Here, the learner transports a native word or expression, untranslated, into the interlanguage utterance. Actually, the motivation for the language switch may be either linguistic (an attempt to avoid a difficult target language form or one that has not yet been learned) or social (such as a desire to fit in with one's peers). Table 1 provides examples of avoidance-type switches. For example, an English-L2 learner might say: "We get this hostie from le prêtre", (Mougeon & Hébrard, 1975) where two lexical switches occur because the learner is unfamiliar with the English words dealing with his religious experience. Gumperz & Hernández-Chávez (1970) and Lance (1969) have documented social reasons for switching, a field of investigation which is beyond the scope of this analysis.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has redefined and operationalized in a detailed manner the notion of communication strategy, a central component of interlanguage. Perhaps a major contribution of this paper has been to explore more fully what "non-native-like" may actually mean beyond the realm of grammatical correctness and into the murky realm of "inappropriateness". As we have seen in this discussion, there are really at least two such sets of strategies, overelaboration and avoidance. In some ways, as we have used it, "overelaboration" is dependent upon negative transfer from NL. Determining the extent to which this is the case is a research project in itself. Levenston (1971) actually attributed both what he called "over-indulgence" and "under-representation" to transfer from the native language. And although we have suggested that the end product of overelaboration are forms which are too formal or elegant, Levenston points out that the end result may also be excessive verbosity or informality. All of this should be explored in greater detail.

The avoidance strategies enumerated in this paper are considered to be by and large distinct from transfer and overgeneralization-- perhaps the principal reason why their mention has generally been left out of much of the second-language acquisition literature. Perhaps they have been considered as behavior at the margin. The reality is that such behavior is in some ways central to interlanguage in that it helps reveal how the learner's interlanguage develops. But clearly there is still a lot of work to be done in this area.

It is altogether likely that this framework is nowhere near all-inclusive of communication strategies. We welcome our readers to suggest

further categories or modification of existing ones. As it is, we realize that the categories described in this paper are not always mutually exclusive one from the other. As stated above, some overelaboration may be a result of transfer from NL, such as the carry over from Li of the relative pronoun ("that" or "which") to an optional or preferably omitted slot in English.

Perhaps the most troublesome issue is that of multidimensionality. It may be too artificial an exercise to attempt to describe monolithically a series of strategies which in reality operate in multidimensional ways. But it seems to us that such an empirically complex state of affairs will only be substantiated attempts on the part of our readers to use this framework to make sense out of second-language acquisition data. We welcome all criticisms and suggestions, and hope that this paper will stimulate not only greater rigor in the use of terminology in our field, but also a continuing interest in describing and explaining the data we are exposed to as teachers and researchers.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

	Phonological	Morphological	Syntactic	Lexical
TRANSFER FROM NL	/ʃip/ for /ʃɪp/	"The book of Jack" for "Jack's book"	"Dió a ellos" for "Les dió a ellos" in Spanish-L2	"Je sais Jean" for "Je connais Jean" in French-L2
OVERGENERALIZATION	"El carro /karo/ es caro" (Flap r generalized to trill contexts--Span.-L2	"He goed" "Il a tombé"in French-L2	"I don't know what is it"	"He is pretty" (Unaware of the semantic limitations)
PREFABRICATED PATTERN	----------	----------	"I don't know how do you do that"	----------
OVERELABORATION	/hwʌtɛrjudʊɪŋ/ for /wʌtʃədʊɪŋ/	"I would not have gone"	"Yo quiero ir"--Span.-L2 "Buddy, that's my foot which you're standing on"	"The people next door are rather indigent"
EPENTHESIS	/setɔre:/ for /stre:/	----------	----------	----------
AVOIDANCE a) TOPIC AVOIDANCE 1.Change topic 2.No verbal response	(To avoid using certain sounds, like /l/ and /r/ in"pollution problems".)	(Avoiding talking about what happened yesterday.)	(Avoiding talk of a hypothetical nature & conditional clauses.)	(Avoiding talk about one's work due to lack of technical vocabulary.)
b) SEMANTIC AVOIDANCE	"It's hard to breathe" for "air pollution"	"I like to swim" in response to "What happened yesterday?"	Q.: "¿Qué quieren los pájaros que haga la mamá?" R.: "Quieren comer." (Spanish-L2)	"Il regarde et il veut boire" to avoid the word for "cupboard" in "Il ouvre l'armoire"
c) APPEAL TO AUTHORITY 1.Ask for form 2.Ask if correct 3.Look it up	Q.:f...? R.:fauteuil (French-L2)	Q.: Je l'ai...? R.: prise. (French-L2)	Q.: El quiere...? R.: que te vayas. (Spanish-L2)	"How do you say "staple" in French?"
d) PARAPHRASE	"Les garçons et les filles" for "Les enfants" (Thus avoiding liaison in French-L2)	"Il nous faut partir" for "Il faut que nous partions" (To avoid subjunctive in French-L2)	"J'ai trois pommes" for "J'en ai trois" (To avoid "en" in French-L2)	High coverage word: "tool" for "wrench" Low frequency word: "labor" for "work" Word coinage:"airball" Circumlocution:"a thing you dry your hands on"
e) MESSAGE ABANDONMENT	"Les oiseaux ga..." ("gazouillent dans les arbres" was intended in French-L2)	"El queria que yo..." ("fuera a la tienda" was intended in Spanish-L2)	"What you...?"	"If only I had a ..."
f) LANGUAGE SWITCH	"I want a couteau"	"Le livre de Paul's" (French-L2)	"Je ne pas go to school" (French-L2)	"We get this hostie from le prêtre" (English-L2)

FOOTNOTES

1. We wish to express our thanks to Larry Selinker, Shoshana Blum, Eddie Levenston, Marjatta Turenius and Raymond Mougeon for their comments on this paper.

2. Larry Selinker is currently working on interlanguage strategies for reading comprehension and may have insights to report in the near future.

3. This example of language switch attributed to a phonological motivation is documented in Celce-Murcia's study (1975). A bilingual child who had difficulty pronouncing the /f/ sound, would attempt to avoid it, where she could, by using an alternate term from the other language. Hence, she would always say "couteau", no matter what language she was using at the time, simply to avoid the /f/ in "knife".

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